United Nations A/C.4/57/SR.11

General Assembly
Fifty-seventh session

Official Records

Distr.: General
21 November 2003
English
Original: French

Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 11th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 15 October 2002, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Maitland ..... (South Africa)

Contents

Agenda item 74: Effects of atomic radiation (*continued*)

Agenda item 19: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (*continued*)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

02-63931 (E)
0263931

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 74: Effects of atomic radiation (*continued*) (A/57/46; A/C.4/57/L.7)

1. **Ms. Kabua** (Marshall Islands) said that the issue of the effects of atomic radiation was a particularly important one for her country because both the people and the environment had suffered greatly as a consequence of the nuclear weapons tests conducted by the United States on its territory in the 1940s and 1950s. More than 50 years later, the people still suffered from health effects, soil contamination still hampered the capacity for development, and the food chain still contained dangerously high radiation levels. After more than half a century, the persistence of toxic nuclear waste produced by the atomic tests created a problem that far exceeded the country's financial and scientific capabilities.

2. The Marshall Islands fully supported the activities of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, whose studies of effects from all sources were of great benefit to all Member States. Her delegation endorsed that Committee's new programme of work and fully supported its request that the General Assembly should reaffirm its support by directing the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to meet its obligations and provide it with adequate funds.

3. **Mr. Hidayat** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of his own country and the other member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam, said that ASEAN welcomed the Scientific Committee's report (A/57/46) and attached great importance to its activities. It especially appreciated the work it was doing to assess the sources of atomic radiation and the role it had played in the establishment of radiation protection recommendations by the International Commission on Radiological Protection and in the formulation of the Basic Safety Standards by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Those standards were of benefit to all developing countries, especially the ASEAN member countries, which had adopted them for their own use.

4. Depleted uranium was a particularly dangerous source of radiation. While it had peaceful applications — as ballast in aircraft, radiation shields in medical equipment used for radiation therapy, or containers for the transport of radioactive materials — it was also very toxic both chemically and radiologically and could seriously damage organs like the kidneys and the lungs. ASEAN encouraged the Scientific Committee, in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO), UNEP and IAEA, to conduct further studies enabling a better assessment of the depleted uranium health risks and to study populations exposed to naturally elevated concentrations of uranium in drinking water.

5. In a world that was increasingly reliant on nuclear energy, safety standards for the protection of the environment were important, and information should be shared about the risks inherent in the operation of nuclear power plants and about the implementation of safeguards. In that connection ASEAN hoped that the Scientific Committee and IAEA would play complementary roles.

6. Lastly, ASEAN was concerned that for lack of adequate support funds, especially from UNEP, the Scientific Committee had been delayed in carrying out its programme of work. It therefore supported that Committee Chairperson's request for a reconsideration of the matter of funding by UNEP so that the Committee could conduct its work effectively and disseminate its findings properly.

7. **Mr. Sawadogo** (Burkina Faso) said that atomic radiation was a matter of serious concern to his country. Burkina Faso had established a Ministry of the Environment and Quality of Life which dealt, inter alia, with issues arising from the serious effects of atomic radiation. There was also a national branch of the IAEA. The Chernobyl crisis must not be forgotten, nor the dangers posed by other forms of radiation, especially from natural sources, as well as from exposure to X-rays and radionuclides used for medical diagnosis and treatment. His country's consumers' league had issued comments on the subject.

8. His delegation invited Member States, partner organizations, experts and universities to work together to understand and combat the harmful effects of atomic radiation. The Scientific Committee could not effectively discharge its mandate if it did not have sufficient funds. His delegation therefore urged UNEP

to continue providing support to it so that it could conduct its work and disseminate its findings.

9. **Mr. Assaf** (Lebanon) observed that, although it was difficult to fully harness natural radiation, it should be possible to bring atomic radiation resulting from human activities under control or at least to attenuate its harmful effects. It was impossible not to be concerned about the fallout from weapons testing or the consequences of ionizing radiation produced by accidents in nuclear power plants, which should all be placed under the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The Middle East was particularly threatened by atomic radiation because Israeli nuclear facilities were not always under that safeguards regime. Israel must therefore comply with Security Council resolution 487 (1981), which called upon it to place its nuclear facilities under the safeguards of the IAEA, and with the General Assembly resolutions to that effect.

10. The Scientific Committee had thus far acquitted itself well of the task assigned to it by the General Assembly in 1955. It was therefore unfortunate that financial difficulties had kept it from holding its regular 2002 session. His delegation supported the request to UNEP by the Chairperson of that Committee that it reconsider the matter of the Committee's financial situation to enable it to continue fulfilling its mandate effectively.

11. **Mr. Mohammed** (Iraq) said that his delegation attached particular importance to the studies, projects and observations of the Scientific Committee, which revealed the extreme toxicity of the ionizing radiation. In Iraq, such radiation was a particularly serious problem since the use in 1991, by the United States Armed Forces, of military devices containing depleted uranium.

12. Many studies had shown that depleted uranium was as dangerous for the health and the environment as any other source of atomic radiation. Reports by the specialized agencies and humanitarian organizations operating in Iraq had, furthermore, drawn attention to the deterioration of the health situation in the country, especially in areas close to the 1991 war theatre, where debris containing depleted uranium was still being found. Children were those who suffered the most, as evidenced by the considerable rise among children of cases of leukaemia, bone and skin cancers and congenital malformations. The rest of the population was also affected, as could be seen in the growing prevalence of breast cancers and the appearance of hitherto unknown diseases.

13. The situation was aggravated by the lack of medical supplies and drugs owing to the embargo imposed on the country. Iraq had asked the IAEA for technical assistance in countering the effects of the attacks on its nuclear plants and of the hundreds of tons of bombs containing depleted uranium that the United States Armed Forces had released over its territory, but it had received no response. The new war that the United States was planning to launch against Iraq could further worsen the situation.

14. Iraq supported the Scientific Committee Chairperson's request to the Executive Director of UNEP for reconsideration of the matter of the Committee's financial situation and appropriation of more funds to enable it to carry out its mandate.

15. **Mr. Elashi** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that ionizing radiation was currently one of the most serious threats that human beings faced because it jeopardized the health of current and future generations. In the Near and Middle East, a rise in radiation owing to the presence of Israeli nuclear facilities was all the more disquieting in that Israel possessed every type of weapon of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, and refused to recognize that ionizing radiation was being released by its nuclear facilities or to place those facilities under IAEA safeguards. The international community should do everything needed to force Israel to do so and to eliminate its nuclear weapons, so that the region could become a nuclear-weapon-free zone no longer exposed to nuclear danger.

16. Although some nuclear Powers had discontinued nuclear testing and used every precaution in transporting and burying their radioactive wastes, much still needed to be done to neutralize the nuclear danger. In order to achieve that goal, nuclear technology would have to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, in particular agricultural and medical purposes, and all countries would accordingly have to renounce any military applications. From that same standpoint, the nuclear Powers which buried their nuclear wastes in the sea, the ocean or the desert would have to be held accountable for such actions, which put all humanity at extreme risk.

17. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya invited all countries and all competent international bodies to cooperate and to publish regular information on ionizing radiation. It also invited the nuclear Powers to stop conducting nuclear research for military purposes and to establish and implement specific programmes s to do away with all nuclear weapons by a specific date.

18. **Mr. Fallouh** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his Government had a great interest in ionizing radiation sources and the impact of radiation on health and the environment, and that it supported the Scientific Committee's new programme of work. It was consequently very concerned by that Committee's lack of funding which was hampering its proper functioning. That crisis had to be resolved so that the Committee could discharge its mandate from the General Assembly. The creation of a web site making the Committee documents available to the public at large was a welcome development.

19. The Syrian Arab Republic's policy was to use nuclear energy solely for peaceful purposes, specifically in the areas of medicine, industry, agriculture, development, the environment and the economy. It had always cautioned against the attempts of certain States to impose draconian conditions on the transfer of technology to countries wishing to use it for peaceful purposes.

20. His Government was aware of the need to eliminate nuclear arsenals because of the inherent dangers. It was party to the 1969 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and was implementing its safeguard agreement with IAEA. It had launched an appeal for the creation in the Middle East of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction and especially nuclear weapons. There was an imbalance in the region caused by the fact that Israel was the only State to possess a nuclear arsenal that was not under the control of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and was not subject to IAEA safeguards, constituting a factor for instability and a source of terror in the region. Given the serious consequences of ionizing radiation for the neighbouring countries, the international community must put pressure on Israel to submit to the safeguards system.

21. **Mr. Chaudhry** (Pakistan) announced that his delegation was sponsoring the draft resolution under the agenda item, and praised the work of the Scientific Committee. He was deeply concerned by the fact that the Committee had not been able to hold its regular session in 2002 because of a budgetary shortfall. The Scientific Committee was working in the interests of all Member States and had to be able to fulfil the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly. He hoped that UNEP would honour its obligations and thus enable the Committee to pursue its work.

22. Pakistan fully supported the Scientific Committee's programme of work adopted in April 2001, particularly with regard to the studies on the health effects from the Chernobyl accident and on the effects of radon, the cellular and molecular studies of radiation's effects on tissues and organs, and the studies on diseases other than cancer. Despite the reassuring conclusion that radiation exposure did not seem to cause hereditary effects in human beings, the new emerging data, especially on DNA mutations, had to be analysed. The Scientific Committee's conclusions should be reviewed in the light of the scientific research in molecular biology, genome sequencing and epidemiology as well as technological advances in related fields in order to remove the remaining uncertainties and increase the degree of confidence in the Committee's findings.

23. Pakistan would continue to support the Committee's intention to pursue its studies on the health effects from the Chernobyl accident with a view to completing and publishing its findings by 2005. It appreciated the close collaboration between the Scientific Committee and scientists from Member States affected by that accident because of the expertise those scientists could contribute. Pakistan assured the Scientific Committee of its fullest cooperation and its readiness to assist it in its efforts to minimize the impact of atomic radiation on human beings and the environment.

Draft resolution A/C.4/57/L.7: Effects of atomic radiation

24. **Mr. Cordeiro** (Brazil) read out a list of the delegations which had joined the sponsors of the resolution: Armenia, Austria, Bulgaria, China, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Egypt, Germany, India, Indonesia, Israel, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, the Russian Federation, Singapore and South Africa. He proposed that the sixth preambular paragraph should be revised by adding, at the end, the clause "and expressing its intention to consider the issue further at its next

session". He suggested that the Committee should adopt the draft resolution by consensus as it had done in preceding years.

25. **The Chairman**, noting that there was no objection to the revision proposed orally by Brazil, said that the Secretariat had informed him that the draft resolution had no financial implications.

26. **Ms. Filipenko** (Ukraine) and **Mr. Popov** (Belarus) announced that they wished to become sponsors of the draft resolution.

27. *Draft resolution A/C.4/57/L.7, as orally revised, was adopted without a vote.*

28. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had concluded its consideration of agenda item 74.

Agenda item 19: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (*continued*)

Revised draft resolution A/C.4/57/L.6: Question of Tokelau

29. **Mr. Huntley** (Saint Lucia), speaking as Chairman of the Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, said that a revision had been made in the preamble to take specific note of the United Nations Mission to Tokelau in 2002. He proposed a further revision, in the last preambular paragraph, where the words "successful decolonization" should be replaced by the words "successful cooperation for decolonization", because the decolonization process was not yet complete. He drew attention to paragraphs 16, 17, 18 and 19, and once again thanked the New Zealand Government for its spirit of cooperation. He proposed that the Committee should adopt the draft resolution as revised, for transmission to the General Assembly.

30. **Mr. Requeijo** (Cuba) asked the Secretariat to go over the Spanish version of the draft resolution because there was a great difference between the original English text and the Spanish and French versions. For example, the term "Modern House" had been rendered in Spanish by "*Cámara Moderna*", whereas in the context of Tokelau the term "House" should be taken not in the sense of "House of Representatives" but in the sense of "home" as in "*casa moderna*". The Secretariat should make a technical correction in the translation, which was at variance with the original English text.

31. **The Chairman** asked the Secretariat to take note of the comments of the Cuban delegation and make the necessary changes.

32. **Mr. Musonda** (Zambia) asked if the report of the United Nations Mission to Tokelau had been issued.

33. **Ms. Wilkinson** (Secretary of the Committee) said that the Committee had decided to consider the question of Tokelau on the basis of the conference room paper in the original language (English), on the understanding that the document would subsequently be issued in the other languages. The Mission had returned in late August-early September and had been unable to submit its report to Conference Services until late September. With the new document processing system that was very strict, it had not been possible, for logistical reasons, to have the report translated into all languages.

34. **Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoué** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that his delegation supported the revision of the draft resolution proposed by the Chairman of the Special Committee and, making a point similar to the one made by the Cuban delegation, that the French text should reflect that revision of the last preambular paragraph.

35. *Revised draft resolution A/C.4/57/L.6, as further revised orally, was adopted without a vote.*

Rights of reply

36. **Mr. Mekel** (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that his Government considered the various allegations made regarding the Israeli nuclear facilities to be false and groundless, and politically motivated. Since the installation of the Israeli nuclear reactors, there had never been any accidents or leakages of radioactive materials into the environment. Moreover, the Israeli authorities regularly conducted studies to determine the level of radioactivity in the country's environment. None of those studies had revealed a rise in the level of radioactivity.

37. **Mr. Assaf** (Lebanon), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, acknowledged that thus far no radiation had escaped from the Israeli nuclear reactors, but said that it did not mean that there was no risk or probability that it might eventually happen. The reason for asking Israel to make its facilities subject to IAEA

safeguards was to ensure that there would be no accident in the future. That request had not emanated from his own delegation but from the international community, and the Security Council in particular. He read out paragraph 5 of Security Council resolution 487 (1981), which called upon Israel urgently to place its nuclear facilities under the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency. If Israel wanted to remain adamant about not submitting its installations to the IAEA safeguards regime, it should take that up with the international community.

38. **Mr. Fallouh** (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the Committee had once again heard an Israeli statement full of falsehoods. His Government had called for making the Middle East a zone free of weapons of mass destruction; it had made its own facilities subject to IAEA safeguards and had signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The fears aroused by ionizing radiation were very real, and many newspapers, both Hebrew and Arabic, had reported radiation escaping from one Israeli reactor. The Israeli nuclear plants would not give out pleasant odours but rather radioactive emissions that would sow death and destruction in the region and in the world. The Israeli delegation was defending ionizing radiation before a body which had unequivocally expressed its position on the matter.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.